

“Get Ready to Follow, Set Your Face, Go on a Journey with Jesus!”

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1 Kings 19:15-15,19-21; Galatians 5:1,13-25; Luke 9:51-62

June 27, 2010

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN.  
The text for this morning’s message is the Gospel for this day.

“Get Ready to Follow, Set Your Face, Go on a Journey with Jesus!” That’s the working title for our message today on a tricky little text that is both straight forward and complicated, challenging and not particularly comforting, well, not at all comforting, to be honest. You see, to truly “get ready to follow” Christians must advertise the truth of this text – the other half of our faith? “What other half?” you ask. The one that Jesus laid out for us in today’s Gospel; the one that, as far as I know, in no way, shape or form has ever shown up on a billboard or bumper sticker or quite possibly, not even in a Sunday bulletin.

No, what we advertise is quite different: “Jesus is the Answer.” “Rough Week? We’re Open Sundays.” “The Family That Prays Together Stays Together.” “You’re Always Welcome At Such And Such Church.” Even our “Jesus, the Joy in our Journey” is a warm and fuzzy expression of our day to day walk as Christians. All of those slogans are true. They are not lies or deceptions.

But they are in stark contrast with what has come to be known as the “hard sayings,” of Jesus—the observations and expectations of like the ones in our text. Once Jesus uttered these words people shook their heads and sadly walked away. Let’s try them on for size this morning as slogans for our outdoor sign.

How about this: “Jesus Is The Way... To Become Homeless And Friendless.” Can’t you just see people streaming through Jehovah’s doors to get a piece of that? Or maybe, “Jesus Loves You So Long As You Hate Your Family?” (So much for a “Focus on the Family!”) Or maybe this one: “No Turning Back, Not Even for Love.” How far do you think we’d get with that? Well, that’s what Jesus with His face set toward Jerusalem is saying to those who are begging to follow and those whom He asks to follow: No, you can’t go bury your dad, no, you can’t go say “goodbye.” If you sign on to the plow the fields of the Kingdom of God, you can never, no, never, not even once, but never, look back. WOW – that’s commitment. Can God be so harsh in these demands?

Well, the Bible does have people who looked back, but it never turned out well, did it? Lot’s wife looked back and she turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus invited a wealthy young man to follow Him and “Richie Rich” was all set to do so until Jesus shared the other part; the part about selling everything and giving the profits to the poor. Richie looked back and declined the

invitation. Coulda Woulda Shoulda been an Apostle Judas Iscariot looked back at the Messiah he was following and didn't like what he saw so he sold Jesus for 30 silver coins. And then he looked back again and in remorse, killed himself. I've even heard of a new Christian driver who looked back and turned into a fire hydrant.

Getting ready to follow seems in this passage to mean looking at and considering "other half" of the Christian message—the dark side, if you want to call it that, that doesn't negate the upbeat, happy stuff, but it certainly grounds it within reality. No, if we're going to be honest with the Gospel this morning, we're going to have to take one more bumper sticker, one more church sign slogan and mess with it until we've told the whole truth.

I'm sure you've all seen it, the one that declares "No (N-o) Jesus, No (n-o) peace. Know (K-n-o-w) Jesus, Know (k-n-o-w) peace." I don't think we can put that on our cars unless we add another one that says "Know (k-n-o-w) Jesus, No (n-o) peace." In fact, Jesus, Himself, said that in one of His other hard sayings about bringing "not peace, but a sword," where children would turn against their parents and friends against each other.

All of these truths are part and parcel - also belong to the Christian faith—our faith. And they might be an inconvenient truth, but they still are the truth. Now before we go any further, let me tell you that there is so much good stuff in this gospel, so many little nuances begging to be explored, so many turns of a phrase we need to "un-turn" so they make sense to 21st century ears, but we're not going to get to all of them – but let me point out a few and move on to "Set Your Face." (Which has absolutely nothing to do with Botox)

This text tells us that Jesus had "Set His face" toward Jerusalem. From the Old Testament we know that setting your face toward someplace is determining a destination – going someplace with judgment. Jesus is going to Jerusalem – the City of God that has not turned in repentance toward God and is now going to call the judgment of God down upon themselves by killing God's only Son. The Samaritans had their own holy mountain – their own version of Judaism – they would be happy to have Jesus come to them as their healer – but not as a judge against the sins of Jerusalem. Frankly, they didn't care about Jerusalem or the Jews. The disciples thought this was reason to call down fire from heaven. Jesus saw no need for that – it would just be an unnecessary show of power. It was not, nor would it ever be the way of Jesus to simply slaughter and crisp up those who would not receive the message of the Kingdom.

Which means you can know without a doubt that not everyone has or will appreciate the fact that you are a Christian (I had a woman tell me once at a wedding reception: "I don't even believe there is a god, but you're so much fun, let's go dance!"); not everyone is going to be willing to tolerate the fact that you are a Christian (I was once run off the road by a group of people who took offense at a bumper sticker I had that said, "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven"). The "fox that has his hole" whom Jesus mentions in our text was Herod, all holed up in his magnificent palaces and waiting for a chance to rid Himself of Jesus of Nazareth,

something his granddaddy had tried unsuccessfully with the slaughter of the baby boys of Bethlehem some 30 years earlier. The birds of the air—those are Jesus’ reference to the Roman eagles, the military standards of the most powerful army on earth, “nested” right inside the holy city of Jerusalem and poised to pounce at the first sign of trouble and of trouble-makers.

Literally Jesus says, “as you follow me you can expect trouble from your own leaders (Herod) and the greater government (Rome). At the very least, you will get a cross to carry— not the cross of flat feet and painful bunions or any other ailment or hardship but the identifying cross – the testimony of your life and faith laid on you the day you were baptized when you were marked with the cross on your forehead and on your heart as one crucified with Christ, buried in the watery death of baptism and raised to eternal life. Oh, that death/crucifixion comes with the sure and certain assurance of the resurrection to life eternal – a newness of life to live in each day on this earth but in this life we must still struggle with the sin that surrounds us, the sin within us, the snares of Satan that would entrap us. And as angry as it makes us, and as often as you and I want to call down heaven-fire to instantly put the enemies of Jesus in their place, to stop the atrocities humanity foists on one another because of greed, lust for power, envy – all those things that are so naturally part of our human nature we who follow Jesus – are called by grace – we are privileged to follow a different path: a path marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – lives filled with the fruits and gifts from the Holy Spirit.

That is what we can expect as we “Go on our Journey with Jesus.” There are six to nine references to being on a journey in this text (the very definite language of Greek also has a little wiggle room for interpretation). This “face set” kind of journey is a mission – a strongly focused, life-changing, world changing, eternity changing mission. A journey of faith where you are constantly focused on the needs of others, saved and unsaved, always concerned with doing what Jesus did – sharing what Jesus has done – bringing the Gospel to all as they see and hear in your life and mine – in all who follow the fruits of the Spirit flourishing in our hostile world. That they might see, be drawn to Jesus, receive the gift of faith, and follow – follow and know Jesus, the Joy in our Journey. That’s our prayer. That’s our path. That’s our proclamation.

Amen.

Now may our sovereign God, the ruler of our hearts who has called us to obey Him in the freedom of faith, keep us faithful as we follow Jesus, the Christ, our Savior and Lord – who promises to keep us in faith and work through our lives and bring us home to heaven.